

Statement of Representative Ed Royce
Chairman, Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation
"Venezuela: Terrorism Hub of South America?"
July 13, 2006

In May, the State Department designated Venezuela as “not cooperating fully” with U.S. anti-terrorism efforts. This designation – not to be confused with the more serious and commonly referred to state sponsorship designation - precludes the sale or licensing of defense articles and services to Venezuela. Venezuela is now the only country on the “not cooperating fully” list that is not also designated as a state sponsor of terrorism.

Back in 2000, the National Commission on Terrorism – the “Bremer Commission” – urged greater use of the “not cooperating fully” designation. The Commission recommended that this category be used as a kind of “halfway house” for reforming state sponsors or as a warning to countries that may be moving toward designation as a state sponsor. It is time to revisit this recommendation. For in our struggle against terrorism, we will need flexible alternatives for both engaging and stigmatizing states.

Venezuela, under President Hugo Chavez, has tolerated terrorists on its soil and has forged close relations with officially designated state sponsors of terrorism: Cuba, Iran, and North Korea. Colombian terrorist groups use Venezuelan territory for safe haven. The armed Colombian groups, though they have waged no attacks on U.S. soil, are among the most active terrorist groups in the world. Several of their leaders have been indicted in the United States for killings and kidnappings of Americans and for drug trafficking. The State Department will testify today that, “While it remains unclear to what extent the Government of Venezuela provides material support to Colombian terrorists, it is difficult to believe that the Chavez government is unaware of, or helpless to prevent such activity.” In my view, Venezuela is walking a thin line between “not cooperating fully” and “state sponsorship.”

Earlier this year, the State Department’s annual terrorism report noted that, “Weapons and ammunition – some from official Venezuelan stocks and facilities – *regularly* turned up in the hands of Colombian terrorist organizations.” Compounding this situation is the recent arrival of the first installment of 100,000 Kalashnikovs from Russia. Furthermore, the Russian agreement allows for Venezuela to enter into licensed production of Kalashnikovs on its soil. It is the fear of many that these new weapons, or the weapons they replace, will end up arming left-wing terrorist groups throughout the continent.

As Members are aware, this Subcommittee has focused on terrorist travel and our border vulnerabilities. It is therefore disconcerting to hear from the State Department today that Venezuelan passports can be forged with “child-like” ease and that the United States is detaining at our borders an increasing number of third-country aliens carrying false Venezuelan documents. According to a 2003 *U.S. News* report, “thousands of

Venezuelan identity documents are being distributed to foreigners from Middle Eastern nations, including Syria, Pakistan, Egypt, and Lebanon.”

There are other worrisome reports of radical Islamist activity in Venezuela. State Department officials have expressed concerns about “groups and individuals” in Venezuela with “links to terrorist organizations in the Middle East.” The al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Hezbollah cells in South and Central America are tied to fundraising and transnational criminal networks that are key to terrorist mobility. Three years ago, an intelligence official was quoted as saying with respect to terrorism in Latin America, “We don’t even know what we don’t know.” I can’t be sure that this has changed.
